



## THE UNFORGETTABLE GOODBYE: A TRIBUTE TO YASMIN AHMAD

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For all intents and purposes, Yasmin Ahmad was an accidental celebrity. She never set out to be one, nor did she crave fame or fortune. The work she did – advertisements, commercials, movies – was drawn from her own experiences and from her heart.

It was truly an honour when she agreed to be one of the keynote speakers at the upcoming AdAsia09 – Kuala Lumpur conference. Her speech would have been laced with the simplicity of telling a good story to engage people from any medium.

Indeed, her approach to simplicity endeared her to millions in Malaysia – and a growing legion of fans globally. Yasmin did not understand the word “commercial.” She played by her rules, guided by her conscience, and worked her unique brand of magic as a writer, creative director, and film director.

Yasmin drew inspiration from a rich potpourri of sources – from Mozart’s *Clarinet Concerto in “A”*, J.M. Barrie’s *Peter Pan*, Tagore’s *The Gardener*, the art works by Andrew Wyeth, and a diverse range of movies from the Bollywood classic *Bobby*, Neil Jordan’s *Mona Lisa*, and Takeshu Kitano’s *Violent Cop*.

She turned 51 years on the 1<sup>st</sup> of July this year. In that short time, she thanked Allah everyday for the ability to breathe, to laugh, to eat and drink. She had an unwavering faith in humankind. In a journey filled with praises, criticisms, kudos, scorn, and censorship, Yasmin persevered by remaining true to her inner instincts.

In her world, race, creed, and religion migrated from one point to the next quite freely. Everyone remembers her cross-cultural Petronas commercials. She expressed herself selflessly in movies like *Rabun* (her 2002 directorial effort) to award-winning triumphs like *Sepet*, *Gubra*, *Mukshin* and *Talentine*.

Yasmin never sat on her laurels. She told stories in her own inimitable way. Even after directing over 50 television commercials, six movies, and winning 11 international awards, she considered her art as an evolutionary process.

She embraced tradition with a fierce passion. She captured drama with a loud crash, balanced sparingly with a quiet poignancy – all within the confines of a modest budget.

Like her memorable television commercials, Yasmin's movies, mostly centred on the lives and times of ordinary Malaysians, were marked with irony, wit, and cynicism. She was an instinctive folk artist, a gifted storyteller, and a sentimentalist. She graduated from Newcastle University majoring in politics and psychology. Upon her return home in 1982, she worked as a trainee banker for two weeks before moving on to IBM as a marketing representative. To supplement her income, and perhaps to add some colour to her life, Yasmin moonlighted as a blues singer and pianist by night.

Her career in advertising began when she joined Ogilvy & Mather as a copywriter. She later moved to Leo Burnett, a place which she called home.

In the 16 years she spent at Leo Burnett as Executive Creative Director, Yasmin not only made her mark as a visionary artist, but a mentor to dozens of young creative talents. She was also a gadfly who gracefully defended her point of view – and encouraged everyone around her to make his or her own mark

The advertising industry has lost a revered sister, an influential voice, and a respected creative icon. Yasmin is irreplaceable. For many years to come, we will continue to learn and be inspired by her rich body of work.

Thank you Yasmin, for being a part of our lives, for touching us with your raging honesty, and for teaching us about simple virtues. Your fetching smile, infectious laughter, and joy for life is firmly entrenched in our memories. For all that and more, we can never say goodbye.